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INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1650
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1466
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0897
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 001594

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SUBJECT: CORRUPTION AND SECURITY VOID IN HINCHE

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 1532

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JANET A. SANDERSON, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. A Poloff visit to Hinche in Center Department August 28-31 determined that local government corruption is pervasive and a central concern of local residents. Local actors blame systematic neglect by the central government (reftel) as the root cause for the corruption. Judicial, police, and tax officials, as well as private citizens, admit that corruption routinely intrudes into their everyday lives. Residents believe that only a massive overhaul of local public institutions can clean out pervasive corruption: firing corrupt public officials, hiring or appointing new ones, providing technical support (computers) and training for all public officials -- and most importantly, providing adequate GoH funding of local institutions. Residents also lament that as a result of the security void in their region, many support vigilante justice and the re-establishment of the Haitian army as a means to create a minimum of law and order. End of summary.

Corruption as a Way of Life

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¶2. (C) Poloff met with residents of Hinche, located in the Center Department of Haiti. All interlocutors claim that corruption in the Center Department does not approach the levels found in Port-au-Prince. Nevertheless, they assert that corruption is embedded into the fabric of every day life. Residents identify the GoH's neglect of the Center Department (reftel) and inadequate financing of local government institutions as the root cause for corruption in the department.

¶3. (C) Poloff met with peasant activist Chavanne Jean-Baptiste on August 30. Jean-Baptiste told Poloff that Hinche Mayor Andre Renard is unilaterally trying to appropriate land that belongs to Jean-Baptiste's Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP) in order to build a new airport. Jean-Baptiste asserted -- and MINUSTAH Regional Bureau Chief for the Center Department, Emilio Castaneda, confirmed during an August 29 meeting -- that Renard did not have the authority to relocate the airport or appropriate land.

Renard, in an August 28 meeting with Poloff, insisted he did.

Castenada said that Renard and the local governing body, Administration of Communal Sections (ASEC), have joint authority for relocating the airport; however, the newly elected ASEC was not yet functioning.

¶4. (C) In addition to losing customs revenues, Mayor Renard noted that residents do not pay their income and property taxes. Philippe Charles, Director General for the tax collection authority in Hinche, told Poloff during an August 29 meeting that residents believe they should not have to pay taxes because the government provides no services for local residents. Corrupt tax inspectors and manual record-keeping make tax evasion easy. When asked how he handled tax inspectors who accepted bribes, Charles replied, "I try to support employees to the best of my ability." He declined to discuss the possibility of sanctions, investigations, or dismissals.

Justice System Affected

¶5. (C) Poloff met with Jean Rene Michel, the government prosecutor, on August 29 at his office. Michel said that judges perverted the justice system by accepting bribes. When asked if he personally is offered bribes, Michel appeared nervous, looked down at his desk, looked away at the window, and then finally said that no one offers him bribes. (Note: We took this to mean that he indeed takes bribes.) Exsersive Servil, the GoH representative to the Center Department, told Poloff during an August 30 meeting that he asked an unspecified person in the GoH to reassign Michel to another position because Michel and the tribunal judge, Marie-Juliette Joseph, are engaged in mutual public accusations of accepting bribes and perverting the course of justice. Servil added that the feud is in part caused by the

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fact that Joseph was provided with a government vehicle and Michel was not.

¶6. (C) In meetings with Poloff, the Citizens' Initiative of Hinche (August 28), womens' groups' representatives (August 30), and Bishop Louis Kebreau, Catholic bishop of the Hinche diocese (August 28), all concur that the entire justice system in the Center Department is corrupt. Jean Edwide Robert, the HNP's Principal Commissioner in the Center Department, frankly admitted to Poloff that his own police force is corrupt, adding that the funds provided by the GoH barely pay their salaries. Fleurant (last name unknown), a riot police officer assigned to protect Bishop Kebreau, told Poloff August 29 that his salary supplement for riot police duty is regularly months late. Bishop Kebreau claimed that, on occasion, he gives officer Fleurant food because he does not receive his salary on time. HNP officer Marie Donald Kerle-Grand, during our August 30 meeting with the womens' groups' representatives, emphasized that the Mirebalais police station -- two hours away from Hinche -- is the only station in the department with functioning radios. Therefore HNP officers have no communication capability with central command in Hinche.

Ex-Army Stepping in to Partially Fill Security Void

¶7. (C) Mayor Renard, MINUSTAH's Castaneda, Robert, and Fleurant note that some towns and villages are under the control of ex-army (FAdH) members. Ex-army members police the town or village either as officers of the Haitian National Police (HNP), as in the case of Cerca Carvajal, or in a vigilante capacity, as in Los Palis. (Note: Jean Edwide Robert, the HNP's Principal Commissioner for the Center Department, is an ex-army captain. End note) Furthermore, GoH Representative in the Center Department Servil claimed as one of his accomplishments a security "understanding" with ex-FAdH members: in exchange for the latter curtailing gross

crimes such as kidnapping, the HNP allowed them 'co-existence' rights and the non-pursuit of their more petty criminal activity.

18. (C) Servil noted that portions of the annual financial support the GoH recently allocated to Haitian parents to help defray the cost of school fees and uniforms was being diverted by powerful officials for their own purposes. He hinted that these officials worked within the GoH and in Parliament. Gladys Dampaix Metellus, a women's group leader and businesswoman, claimed that local leaders reprogram GoH funds sent for women's programs after declaring that the funds are insufficient to cover the designated project. The leaders of the womens' groups also claim that women rarely participate in the planning of projects ostensibly designated for their benefit.

19. (C) Comment. Local officials use the GoH's inadequate financing of local institutions and the ensuing scramble for limited resources as a pretext for their own corruption and dereliction of duty. Lack of financing is indeed one cause of the dysfunctionality of and corruption within local government. So are habits of corruption, disdain for law, and lack of security that have developed over the ages. Yet it was encouraging to find that all in Hinche recognize the need for radical change. Local officials, enmeshed in graft and internecine squabbling, grudgingly recognize the necessity of a comprehensive and stringent anti-corruption program by the GOH. While they outwardly tow the anti-corruption line, these officials know there are no institutions in place to curb impunity. Residents support radical GoH action to uproot corruption. GoH neglect in security matters has led to local reliance on ex-FAdH members exercising vigilante justice. Local apprehension over lack of security and support for vigilante justice by ex-FAdH members is the backdrop for local support for re-establishment of the army. FAdH's popularity in the Center Department is not negatively affected by its role in past political coups. There is a direct link in Hinche between the central government's laissez-faire approach toward the behavior of its local functionaries and the level of corruption that exists.

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